

# the pits

## WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Cape gooseberry, Carambola, Carob, Cherimoya, Cippolini, Bitter melon, Date, Feijoa, Guava, Horned Melon, Kumquat, Lemon grass, Malanga, Mango, Ñame, Pepino melon, Papaya, Passion fruit, Prickly pear (pads & fruit), Tamarillo, Taro, and Water Chestnuts. Keep an eye out for Spanish limes in Latin markets.

## SEEDS

Last month the run on coffee seeds was so great that Bob ran out within a few days. We are returning checks and money to those whose orders he could not fill. We hope to obtain more supplies in the future. This month Bob is offering tamarind, gardenia, spanish lime (genipe), *passiflora lutea* and stone pine seeds. He has lots and assures you he will not run out.

If you are interested send, \$1.00 per packet and an SASE to: Bob Jurgens, 116-32 227th St., Cambria Heights, NY 11411. Checks should be made payable to the Rare Pit and Plant Council.



## In Memoriam (1994) (1993)

**THE NEW YORK FLOWER SHOW** will not be held this year. Last year's three-day blizzard, that occurred on the opening weekend of the show, reduced attendance and caused a severe financial loss. We shall miss all the chaos, confusion and the crowds, but most of all we will miss not being able to work with and meet so many of our subscribers.

### **ANNUAL COCKTAIL AND PLANT SALE PARTY**

September 8, 1993, 5:30 - 7:30 pm

251 West 11th Street

New York, NY 10014

**Everyone** who receives this letter is invited to come. We are just two blocks from the 7th Ave. IRT. Get off the train at 14th St. Use the 12th St. exit, walk south on 7th Ave, hang a left at W. 11th and walk to the stop light. **CORRECTION ... Turn right at West 11th Street!!!!**

# ANNUAL PLANT SALES

This year we ordered our plants from Logees Greenhouses in Danielson, Connecticut. They have one of, if not the largest collection of rare houseplants for windowsill gardeners. We have bought from them for years, but never seriously looked for Pits in the catalog. We knew they had a few, and on careful inspection, we learned Logees have a lot. All their plants are grown for ornamental value. Most of the pits listed below will flower and fruit within a year or two, those that do not, will be welcome additions to a foliage collection.

We placed the order in early June in hopes of growing them on to a larger size. The plants arrived in 2" plastic pots and we repotted all of them (Texas method) into 4" pots and they grew and grew and grew; some have grown so large they are now in 5 quart nursery containers.

## THE PICK OF THE PITS



**Cinnamomum zeylanicum**  
Cinnamon  
Lauraceae  
Zone 10

Ceylon  
30'  
Evergreen shrub

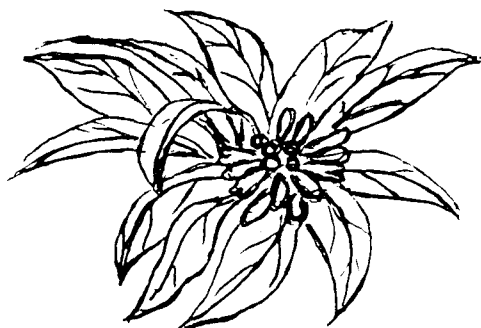
Cinnamon is a large stately bush from Ceylon. The bark is aromatic and produces the cinnamon of commerce. The dark, glossy green leaves are lanceolate and about 5" long. The new growth is copper colored. The flowers are yellow-green, and borne at the leaf axils in long panicles. It is unlikely to bloom in the home. Cinnamon can be grown on a Western or Northern window sill.

**Cinnamomum camphora** China & Japan  
Camphor 100'  
Lauraceae Semi-evergreen tree  
Zone 10



Camphor is a very large evergreen tree that is cultivated for the oils produced by its leaves, and twigs. These oils are processed to make camphor.

The leaves are alternate, 5" long, dark green above and whitish beneath. These trees shed their leaves in the early spring, but immediately replace them. It is unlikely the tree will ever bloom in the home, but if it should the flowers will be small and yellow. Culture is the same as above.



**Illicium anisatum** China, Japan,  
Anise-tree 25'  
Illiciaceae Evergreen tree  
Zone 8-10

The anise-tree is an understory tree of the forest and thickets of Japan and China. Its wood is used for incense and it is revered by Buddhists.

The lustrous, alternate, leathery leaves are 4" long and fragrant when crushed. The yellowish, oddly shaped, flowers are 1" across and surrounded by bracts that look like the dried bracts of star anise (*I. verum*). It is unlikely to bloom in the home. The anise-tree contains a poisonous alkaloid and is not used in cooking. Culture is the same as above.

The following plants will all fruit and flower in the home if their culture requirements are met. All need at least 6 hours of sunlight (not filtered), night-time temperatures around 55-65° (unless otherwise noted), good air circulation, and ample moisture.

**Coffea arabica:** See April - June 1993 newsletter.



**Feijoa sellowiana** South America  
Pineapple guava 18'  
Myrtaceae Evergreen shrub  
Zone 9

Pineapple guava is one of the plants that has grown so fast it has had to be transplanted twice. They have been pinched back and are bushy 12" plants and should bloom within the next 18 months. The 3 inch, ovate foliage is dull green on top and white underneath. The flowers are gorgeous; the petals are white on the inside with a purple blush on the outside and have 3" bright red stamens. The fruits are dull green, tinged with red and about 3" long.

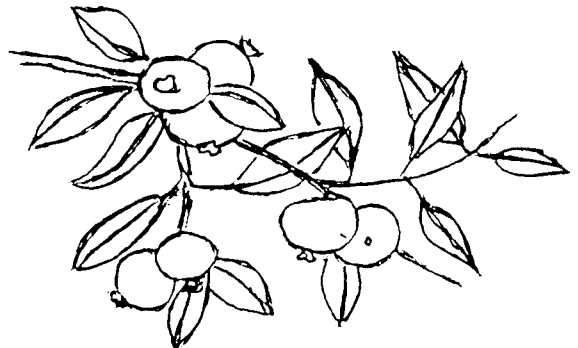


**Malpighia glabra** Texas - South America  
Barbados cherry 10'  
Malpighiaceae Evergreen shrub  
Zone 9

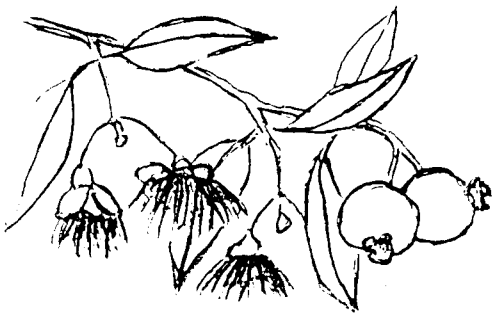
Barbados cherry is a very, showy plant. The lanceolate, 4" leaves are alternate and dark green. The pale pink flowers are borne in circular clusters. These are followed by small 3/8" red berries that are edible. Ours

has been blooming all summer long and now is beginning to set fruit. (These plants will be a bit smaller, as they were not included in the original shipment. Ours, however, bloomed within 6 months of purchase.)

**Psidium littorale** Brazil  
Guava 25'  
Myrtaceae Evergreen shrub  
Zone 10



Guava is a small tree or shrub with gray-brown bark. The ovate leaves are 3" long and a soft gray-green. The fragrant white flowers are 1" across and bloom in the early summer. The fruit is 1 1/2" long and has a slight taste of strawberry. These little trees have been growing up a storm and should be ready to fruit next summer.



**Syzgium jambos** Southeast Asia  
Rose apple 30-40'  
Myrtaceae Evergreen tree  
Zone 10

Rose apple is a tall stately tree, but we have been assured that it will bloom when it is quite small, perhaps in a year. The leaves are 8" long, dark green and very glossy. The pale yellow flowers resemble powder puffs and are very fragrant. The fruits are creamy yellow, ovoid and taste like rose water. These have also been growing like weeds.

**Murraya paniculata** Southeast Asia.  
 Orange jasmine 10-12'  
 Rutaceae Evergreen shrub  
 Zone 10



I have always wanted to write an article about the gems on my windowsill...those plants that bloom and bloom and don't attract pests! This is one of my pets and what a surprise to find it listed in Steve's *Cornucopia* "The fragrant flowers are used to scent tea. The fruit is also edible."

The dark glossy green foliage is quite delicate. It is pinnate with 3-9 small ovate leaflets. The flowers are white, intensely fragrant, and are followed by 1/4" red berries. My 6" plant blooms off and on throughout the year. The plant is small, charming and should be in every collection.

(The plants available at the sale will be smaller because we have just bought them when we found them listed as a fruit.)



**Glycyrrhiza glabra** S. Europe, Asia  
 Licorice 3'  
 Leguminosae Herbaceous perennial  
 Zone (6?) 7-10

Licorice does not grow on long stringy strands from a "Delicatessen" tree. It is a hardy herbaceous perennial that spreads by means of thick stoloniferous roots. These are dug in

the fall, dried and then processed.

The plant is rather straggly, resembling the vetches seen scrambling on the roadsides of North America. The blue-green leaves are pinnate, with 4- 8 pairs of leaflets. Short spikes of blue flowers are borne in the fall. It is invasive and has escaped cultivation in California where it grows wild.

Their culture is a bit of guess work. If they drop their leaves, leave the plant in its pot, withdraw water and keep in a very cool spot. When new growth starts, resume watering and place the plant in a sunny window. Or dig the plant into the herb garden. They should be hardy at least as far north as NYC or Boston.

**Satureja viminea** West Indies  
 Costa Rican mint bush 3'  
 Labiatae Evergreen shrub  
 Zone 10



Costa Rican mint is a delicate, bushy little plant that would make an excellent subject for bonsai. The light green, 1/4" leaves are oval and have a strong aroma of pennyroyal. The foliage is dense and the bush quite twiggy and the plant has a weeping habit of growth. In the spring it is covered with tiny white flowers.

One leaf added to a cup of sherbet or sorbet adds a refreshing hint of mint. Costa Rican mint does not require as much light as the other plants listed, however, NEVER LET IT DRY OUT.

**CITRUS:** Logees has one of the finest collections of citrus trees for home culture. We asked them to make a selection for us and this is what they sent:

**Citrus aurantifolia:** 'Key Lime' is a warm growing shrub that needs temperatures above 60<sup>0</sup> to flower and fruit. The fruits are the size of walnuts, very aromatic and the "key" to Key Lime Pie.

**Citrus otaheite:** 'Dwarf orange' is actually a lime. It is a particularly floriferous citrus that almost always has either flowers or fruits. Ours are about one year from blooming.



**Citrus limon variegata:** 'Variegated lemon' has lovely soft green leaves with a white margin. The fruits are also slightly striped. A handsome plant with or without fruits and flowers.

**Fortunella hindsii:** 'Formosan kumquat' is one of the most diminutive citrus you can grow. It has tiny (1/4") glossy green leaves and bears tiny, but tasty round orange fruits. In the Orient, these small trees will be used as a centerpiece for a banquet. When the meal is through, guests are welcomed to take a small fruit to clear the palate.

**Fortunella margrita:** 'Nagami kumquat' is a delightful summer flowering shrub that produces 1 1/2" oval orange fruits. These make a delicious marmalade or the fruits can be preserved in a heavy syrup.

**Citrus 'myrtifolia':** Sour orange has tiny, narrow, myrtle-like leaves. The fruits are edible, but very sour. It is a charming tiny plant that would make good subject for bonsai.

All citrus require strong sunlight, ample moisture, and regular feedings with a fertilizer that has chelated trace elements (Mir-acid and Miracle-Gro are examples). They all have incredibly fragrant waxy white flowers and produce fruit without pollination. No home should be without at least one citrus plant!!

*For those of you, who live too far away to come to the cocktail party, you can buy all these trees and shrubs through Logees Greenhouses, 141 North Street, Danielson, CT 06239. The glossy, full colored catalog costs \$3.00. This cost is refundable with your first purchase. When you receive your plants they will be well rooted, but in tiny pots. Repot immediately in 3-4" pots. The plants are healthy, clean, and robust!*

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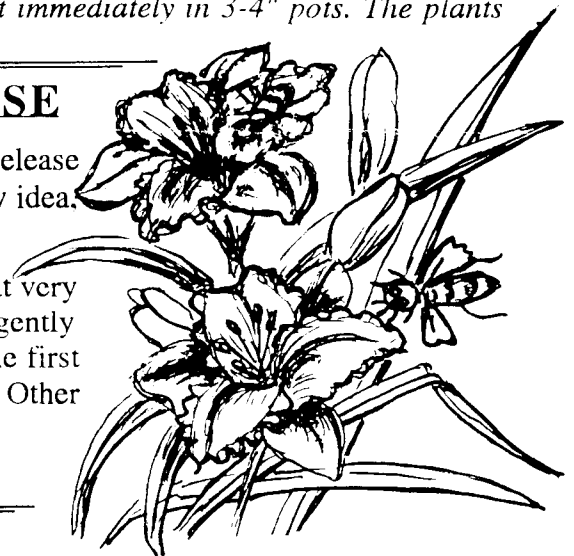
## **NO BEES, PLEASE**

The American Hemerocalis Society just sent us a Press Release admonishing us to, "Please Eat the Flowers". This is not a new idea. In fact, we tried 20 years ago.

I carefully selected daylilies blossoms that had closed up that very day. I dipped them in a light batter and sauted them ever so gently in butter. The family was very skeptical, so naturally I took the first (and last bite). Inside was a perfectly preserved Earwig. Other blossoms contained perfectly cooked bees.

**MORAL:** *Use the buds, not the blossoms!*

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## **RON GOLDENSON'S CHIVE BLOSSOM VINEGAR**

Simply remove the stem from the soft round lavender globe-like flowers and fill an 8 oz. jar half full of chive blossoms. Fill the jar with white wine vinegar. The vinegar turns a lovely lavender color and has a very mild essence of onion.

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### **Translations run Amuck**

*Two signs from a Majorcan shop entrance: "English well speaking. Here speeching American."*

*From the Soviet Weekly: "There will be a Moscow Exhibition of Arts by 150,000 Soviet Republic painters and sculptors. These were executed over the past two years."*

*In a Belgrade hotel elevator: "To move the cabin, push button for wishing floor. If the cabin should enter more persons, each one should press a number of wishing floor. Driving is then going alphabetically by national order."*

**Does anyone have any pit-like examples, say of growing instructions, in fractured English?**

# **CONFUSION ABOUT INFUSION HERB FLAVORED OILS**

Oils and Botulism, by Peggy Hacskeylo from Potomac Potpourri, February 1993:

"In the mid-1980s several beautiful books on herbs were published. Many had brief sections on preparing herbed oils. What a nice idea; how simple to do - an easy way to get flavor into the cooking, and oh, they look so pretty. .... we enjoyed them until my attention was called to a news item. Some people in New England had become ill with botulism poisoning from an oil flavored with garlic. Back came what I had learned in bacteriology and out went all the herbed oils. My husband and I had been lucky.

Botulism is a severe disruption of the functioning of the motor nervous system caused by a toxin produced in foods. It can take up to a week for the symptoms to appear and can result in death in 60 to 70% of the cases. The offending organism that produces the toxin is *Clostridium botulinum*, a rod-shaped bacterium which occurs universally in soils. It forms spores that are highly resistant to heat and will grow on food materials in the absence of oxygen at pH levels above 4.5. This is why we pressure can non-acid foods such as beans. In the presence of proteins, such as meat, foul-smelling hydrogen sulfide is produced and the spoilage can be detected. In canned goods we look for swollen cans and bulging, loose lids caused by gases building in closed containers.

You don't have to be a New Yorker to read and love the New York Times, especially the Sunday edition with its wonderful crossword puzzle and food section. On Sunday, May 30th, the food section ran an article "A Summer of Drizzle" by Molly O'Neill. She featured tarragon, basil and lemon-parsley oil. They sounded so much more tempting than herbal vinegars.

Two weeks later I received my newsletter (edited by Pat Girardi) from the New York Unit of the Herb Society of America. Pat had found the following article in her files: Herbed

Let us consider what the problem is in herbed oils. Essentially, we are introducing plant material which has contact with the soil into a non-acid medium that effectively seals out oxygen - a perfect medium for *C. botulinum*. Temperatures of 240° F for up to 30 minutes are needed to destroy the spores. Vegetable oils cannot be heated to this temperature without destroying the quality and flavor. (of the foods?) Commercially produced should be pasteurized using special equipment. But even here one must use caution when purchasing since laws governing their production may be lax. USDA Bulletin 410, Canning, Freezing, Storing Garden Products, warns that the addition of fat and oil can increase the survival of the spores when heated. Because a bottle of oil cannot be effectively sealed, any gases produced will leak from the bottle, making the detection of spoilage impossible.

Although the toxin is easily destroyed by heat and the oils could be used for cooking procedures using high heat, they should never be used in salad dressings and other, fresh, non-cooked food. Far better to get the fresh herb flavor by preparing herb pastes and pestos to be stored in the freezer as recommended by Madalene Hill and Gwen Barclay. These may be added to fresh oils for marinades and dressings." ▶

## 6 Weeks Later:

We never published that article because we could not get satisfactory answers to the following questions about the infused oils on the market.

1. Are the commercially prepared chopped garlic and infused oils that are sold in gourmet shops pasteurized?
2. What is the risk of botulism from them or from home-made infused oils? We have used chopped garlic, on a regular basis for years.

We called Michael Klein, the Products and Merchandize manager at Balduccis and he answered our questions. The chopped garlic that comes packed in oil and the elegant bottles of infused oils that are sold in gourmet shops are safe. They have been pasteurized at intense heats that kill the botulinum bacteria.

Botulism is a very serious threat to home prepared infused oils. Garlic is the greatest danger...the clove is moist and when added to oil at room temperature, provides a perfect medium for botulism. Home made infused oils should be treated as fresh produce and always stored in the refrigerator. Herbal infused oils are beautiful to look and delicious to taste...we shall continue to buy them, but refrain from making our own.



**Directions:** Use the letters on each rack to make a "pit" name or related word. Use the "Scrabble" method of scoring; each letter counts face value except on double or triple letter spaces. Add letter counts for word score; multiply by 2 or 3 for double or triple word score. 50 point bonus for 7-letter word.

**Par Score:  
280-325**

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